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# Electronic Media Reviews

Ron Buchan

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# ELECTRONIC MEDIA REVIEWS

RON BUCHAN, EDITOR

## COMPUTER SIMULATIONS

*Moonbase: lunar colony simulator.* Austin, TX: Wesson International; 1990. Simulator runs on IBM PC and compatibles; required are 640K memory, graphics card and graphics monitor. Microsoft: compatible mouse optional. Both 3.5-inch and 5.25-inch disks included.

Computer simulation has been applied to a lunar colony. The user interface is quite similar to the popular SimCity simulator: menu menus along the top and left side, and a close-up map of a (randomized) moon surface in the center. A mouse is optional, in theory, but really necessary. You select items with the mouse, such as habitats or reactors, and place them on the map. Most structures have to be hooked up to power and to heat radiators. You grow your colony, choose how many inhabitants you want, and try to develop an independent economy. You get some support from NASA (the amount is bigger if you manage to do some science, smaller if there are problems on Earth); you can mine helium-3, oxygen, and water (if you can find any); and you can develop electronics manufacturing. You also have to keep your workers happy.

In short, it's too easy to be realistic, not enough happens, and far too little feedback is available. Too easy: in my very

first try, I developed a viable lunar colony while I was learning to use the simulator. (It was helpful to read the manual, which is well done, and quite informative.) Not enough happens: one of the important features of SimCity is that there is a complex model underlying the simulation, and that properties develop and change on their own, even if you just stop and watch for a while; Moonbeam is not like that. Structures do not develop after you place them. Not enough feedback: you are supposed to keep your workers happy by not overworking them, and by providing recreation facilities. But you don't know anything about their state of mind until you get a warning that they are threatening a strike.

A Lunar Colony Simulator is a good idea, but this one is based on a model that is too simple to be realistic, and the simulation is much too easy to be enjoyable for more than a few hours.

Jim Blue  
National Institute of  
Standards Technology

### COMPUTER TUTORIALS

*Gram.mat'ik Windows 2.0, Government edition.* Reference Software International, 330 Townsend Street, Suite 123, San Francisco, CA 94107. (415) 541-0222. DOS, Windows, and Macintosh versions: \$99 each; Unix version, \$295.

In big bold letters on the front of the box, the makers of Grammatik proclaim it is "the easiest way to improve your writing." Unfortunately, Grammatik is not the most accurate way. In a small one-page document with 50 errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage, Grammatik missed 8 of them, misplaced by several sentences its flag for a closing quote, and incorrectly advised that a "we" be changed to "us."

Using the graphical user interface (GUI) of Windows for the PC, Grammatik offers direct support of five Windows word processors and more than twenty DOS word processors, including WordPerfect. The program can check a document interactively (prompting the user for action when it finds an error) or mark a document for later examination.

Grammatik offers a choice of proof-reading styles: general, fiction, business, informal, and custom. The Government edition adds one style, proposal, which uses every Grammatik rule dictionary and class. The Government Edition claims to incorporate hundreds of government writing guidelines. In addition, the Government Edition can compare a document to three standard documents: *The Gettysburg Address*, a sample insurance policy, and the directions for the IRS Form 1040EZ.

Reference Software International offers technical support (not toll-free, however) and a 30-day, money-back guarantee. Registered users will receive a copy of Dewitt H. Scott's *Secrets of Successful Writing*. Although grammar checkers may have improved in the last few years, they are still no substitute for a careful reading of one's own writing.

Bruce Ansley

NASA Center for AeroSpace Information  
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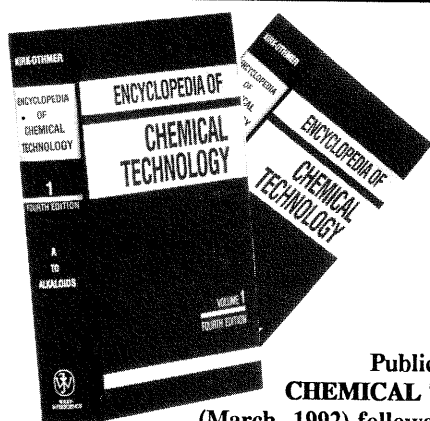
### VIDEO TAPES

*The astronomers.* Beverly Hills, CA: Pacific Arts Video Publishing; 1991. Six tapes. \$19.95 each, \$129 (sic) a set of six. Available from PBS Video Finder. 1-800-328-7271.

The mysteries of the universe and the methods by which scientists and astronomers are obtaining answers to these mysteries are presented by the teams who are actually performing the investigations. Six video tapes, each an hour long, examine subjects such as dark matter, black holes, quasars, Big Bang theory, cosmic background radiation, gravity waves, birth and death of stars, supernovae characteristics, exploration of the solar system by unmanned spacecraft, and the search for other habitable planets. The objectives of each program are carefully defined, the methods for achieving the desired results are explained, and the types of equipment involved are demonstrated. Actual accomplishments are presented through the display of information obtained by radio astronomy, astronomical photography, spectrographic analysis, and televised data

resulting from planetary explorations. The underlying theme of the tapes is that astronomers, scientists, and engineers, without regard to nationality, have combined their talents and conducted their experiments with complete cooperation and respect in the common quest for better understanding of our universe.

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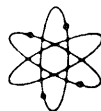
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